

Clemson University

TigerPrints

---

Publications

Educational & Organizational Leadership

---

1-1-2023

## Ageism in Recruiting: Examining the Relationship between Coaches' Age and Recruiting Ability in Power-5 Football

Chris Corr  
*Troy University*

Christopher Atwater  
*Troy University*

Sarah Stokowski  
*Clemson University*, [stoko@clemson.edu](mailto:stoko@clemson.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ed\\_org\\_ldrshp\\_pub](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ed_org_ldrshp_pub)

---

### Recommended Citation

Corr, Chris; Atwater, Christopher; and Stokowski, Sarah, "Ageism in Recruiting: Examining the Relationship between Coaches' Age and Recruiting Ability in Power-5 Football" (2023). *Publications*. 5.  
[https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ed\\_org\\_ldrshp\\_pub/5](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/ed_org_ldrshp_pub/5)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational & Organizational Leadership at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).

- Klein, S. (1971). *Workers Under Stress: The Impact of Work Pressure on Group Cohesion*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.
- Lerner, R.M., Lerner, J.V., Almerigi, J.B., Theokas, C., Phelps, E., Gestdottir, S., & von Eye, A. (2005). Positive youth development, participation in community youth development programs, and community contributions of fifth grade adolescents: Findings from the first wave of the 4-H study of positive youth development. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 25*, 17-71.
- Li, F., & Harmer, P. (1996). Confirmatory factor analysis of the group environment questionnaire with an intercollegiate sample. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology, 18*, 49-63.
- Mikalachki, A. (1969). *Group Cohesion Reconsidered*. London, Canada: The University of Western Ontario.
- Pacewicz, C.E., Smith, A.L., & Raedeke, T.D. (2020). Group cohesion and relatedness as predictors of self-determined motivation and burnout in adolescent female athletes. *Psychology of Sport & Exercise, 50*, 1-8.
- Taylor, I.M., & Bruner, M.W. (2012). The social environment and developmental experiences in elite youth soccer. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 13*, 390-396.
- Terry, P.C., Carron, A.V., Pink, M.J., Lane, A.M., Glyn, J.W., & Hall, M.P. (2000). Perceptions of group cohesion and mood in sport teams. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice, 4*, 244-253.

## Ageism in Recruiting: Examining the Relationship between Coaches' Age and Recruiting Ability in Power-5 Football

Chris Corr

Troy University

Christopher Atwater

Troy University

Sarah Stokowski

Clemson University

A recent trend among National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports is the targeted hiring of younger coaches. Such strategic hiring is, ostensibly, due to the perceived recruiting ability of younger, more energetic coaches. Given the importance of recruiting to overall programmatic success in college athletics, perceived recruiting advantage is a significant and influential motivator for those in leadership positions. To test the assumption of youthfulness as a key indicator of recruiting ability, the present study sought to analyze the relationship between coaches' age and recruiting ability in Power-5 football. An analysis of the 2019 and 2020 Power-5 football recruiting classes indicate that coaches' age is not a significant predictor of recruiting ability. The findings of this study challenge the conventional perception that youthfulness is integral to recruiting ability.

*Keywords:* NCAA, FBS, recruiting, hiring

The University of Georgia's ascension to the preeminent football program in the Power-5 has been achieved through unparalleled recruiting success (Clay, 2022). According to 247Sports team recruiting rankings, Georgia has not finished worse than sixth and has signed the number one ranked recruiting class twice since Kirby Smart was hired as head football coach in 2016. In an interview after winning the Southeastern Conference (SEC) championship for the first time as a head coach in 2017, Smart praised the work of Georgia's recruiting staff and specifically noted the value of hiring current students and recent graduates to recruiting positions:

That kid might be able to relate better than I can. He knows the music [recruits] listen to, where they go, what they want to see. The more juice you have, the more youthfulness, the better off you are. (Thamel, 2017, para. 15)

Such expressed emphasis on youthful enthusiasm and its inherent importance to establish relatability between recruiters and recruits is noteworthy given social effectiveness and the ability to form genuine connections with recruits are the most influential factors contributing to the enrollment decisions of prospective college athletes (Magnusen et al., 2011, 2014). As similar aged individuals hold a greater likelihood of immediate social relatability (Laiduc et al., 2021), athletic department institutional members' (e.g., coaches, recruiters) age may be a significant indicator predisposing the ability for certain coaches to have recruiting success.

While recruiting personnel occupy a vital role in the recruitment of prospective athletes, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) regulations permit only coaches to conduct recruiting activities off the campus of

the institution itself (NCAA, 2022, Bylaw 11.7.1). Coaches' ages and youthfulness are, accordingly, also markedly important to establishing relatability and successful recruiting (Backus, 2023). Less than two years after winning the College Football Playoff national championship, Ed Orgeron was fired as the head football coach at Louisiana State University (LSU). Amid a bevy of scandalous and salacious turmoil, Orgeron's assistant coach and coordinator hires were heavily criticized as out of touch with prospective recruits:

Orgeron had a staff primarily composed of older White men who were past their primes, not as skilled at recruiting and not well-suited for relating to a young, primarily Black roster. It was a group comprised of old buddies. (Miller, 2021, para. 29)

While assortative race matching and tasking of disproportionate recruiting responsibilities based on race have been found to be commonplace, and extremely effective, in recruiting (Corr et al., 2022), the inability for older coaches hired by Orgeron at LSU to relate to prospective recruits seemingly influenced the deconstruction of a roster laden with National Football League (NFL) talent just two years prior to Orgeron being fired. As noted by Texas Christian University (TCU) athletic director Jeremiah Donati during the football program's run to the CFP national championship game in 2022, "Young people know best about what young people want. We need to rely on them. They are our boots on the ground" (Maisel, 2022, para. 17).

Such youthful rationale in assembling a coaching staff is not limited to the present. In 1996, University of Notre Dame (Notre Dame) offensive line coach Joe Moore was fired by new head coach Bob Davie. Moore, a prominent figure in college football that had been at the university for

nearly a decade, had coached numerous players that went on to have successful careers in professional football. Davie justified firing the 64-year-old Moore by expressing his desire to hire someone younger that could, in part, relate more adequately to recruits (Lieberman, 2001). Moore filed an age discrimination lawsuit and a jury mandated Notre Dame remunerate the coach for lost wages, back pay, and court fees (*Moore v. University of Notre Dame*, 1997).

While youth has been characterized as “a desirable quality for modern college football coaching candidates” (Backus, 2023, para. 8), no study to date has quantitatively examined if coach age is a significant indicator in ability to successfully recruit prospective athletes. Seeking to examine the phenomenon of recruiting and coach age, the present study sought to contextualize the role of Power-5 football coaches’ ages and the ability to recruit highly ranked recruits (i.e., five- and four-star recruits). Given that higher rated recruits are more strongly correlated to athletic success (i.e., winning) (Caro, 2012; Elmasry, 2017; Kercheval, 2016; Mankin et al., 2021) and winning football games is integral to athletic department and institutional revenue streams (Brook, 2016; Grant et al., 2013; Sparvero & Warner, 2013), the value of signing five- and four-star recruits to athletics grant-in-aid (GIA) cannot be understated. To guide the methodological framework underpinning this study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Are younger coaches more likely to sign five- and four-star recruits than older coaches?
2. Are younger coaches responsible for recruiting more prospective recruits than older coaches?

## Methodology

### DATA COLLECTION

Recognized as the industry leader in NCAA football recruiting rankings and news (247Sports, 2012), 247Sports was utilized to collect all recruiting based information for analysis in this study. For each recruit, 247Sports lists a primary recruiter that is the coach designated to be the lead recruiter for a given prospect. The primary recruiter is deemed to be the most influential coach in the recruitment of a prospective athlete. Accordingly, for the purposes of the present study every recruit that signed with a Power-5 football program in the recruiting classes of 2019 and 2020 was analyzed. Variables such as primary recruiter, recruit star rating (e.g., five-star, four-star, three-star), and recruit race were captured as part of the analysis. Coaches’ ages were identified through institutional athletic department media guides and available online coaching profiles. The researchers were able to identify the specific age for 93% of Power-5 football coaches included in this study ( $n = 1430$ ). Coaches where specific age was unable to be identified typically had been coaching college football for over two decades. However, as specific age was not able to be ascertained, these 96 coaches and their corresponding recruits were removed from the study.

### DATA ANALYSIS

This study was conducted as a secondary data analysis of college football recruits in relation to the age of recruiting coaches during the seasons of 2019-2020. The sample was comprised of 3,155 recruits rated as three-, four-, or five-stars by 247Sports. The age range for coaches was 25-73 which was broken down into seven age groups: 25-31,

32-37, 38-43, 44-49, 50-55, 56-61, and 62 years old or more. The intent of the analysis was to determine the extent to which a recruiting coach's age was related to the quality of the players they signed (i.e., star rating).

### Results

In examining the entire sample, crosstabs were executed to demonstrate the average star rating of recruits by age group. Results indicated no significant difference between the age group of recruiting coaches in relation to the average star rating of recruits.

Table 1  
*Average Star Ratings of Recruits by Age Group*

Coach's age group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
25-31 years old	156	3.42	0.57
32-37 years old	572	3.38	0.56
38-43 years old	713	3.33	0.52
44-49 years old	670	3.37	0.55
50-55 years old	603	3.40	0.56
56-61 years old	277	3.35	0.54
62 or older	164	3.40	0.54

To explore the results deeper, the data were subsetted to only include *elite* recruits, rated four- or five-stars, resulting in a sample size of 1,070 recruits. The results again, indicated no significant difference between a coach's age group and the average star rating of recruits.

Table 2  
*Average Star Ratings of Elite Recruits  
(5- and 4-star players) by Age Group*

Coach's age group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
25-31 years old	59	4.10	0.30
32-37 years old	195	4.10	0.32
38-43 years old	221	4.07	0.26
44-49 years old	225	4.10	0.30
50-55 years old	219	4.10	0.30
56-61 years old	89	4.10	0.30
62 or older	62	4.06	0.25

Consideration was also given solely to five-star players ( $n = 101$ ). Results indicated younger coaches are not more successful in signing the most sought-after recruits (i.e., five-stars) ( $n_{25-31} = 6$ ,  $n_{32-37} = 22$ ,  $n_{38-43} = 16$ ,  $n_{44-49} = 22$ ,  $n_{50-55} = 22$ ,  $n_{56-61} = 9$ ,  $n_{62+} = 4$ ). While the 22 five-star recruits signed by the 32-37-year-old age group is notable, the same number of five-star recruits were signed by the 44-49- and 50-55-year-old age groups as well.

### Discussion & Implications

Despite the proliferated belief throughout the NCAA recruiting industry, the results of this study indicate that no statistical relationship existed between age and recruiting success among the 2019 and 2020 Power-5 football recruiting classes. Across stratified age groups, Power-5 football coaches are similarly likely to successfully recruit

five-, four-, and three-star recruits. While structural alterations to college football may organically be driving older coaches out of collegiate athletics, opening a pathway for an influx of younger coaches seeking to prove themselves (Brown, 2023; Straka, 2023), age appears to be a mitigated factor within the recruitment of prospective athletes.

Such findings further illustrate the value of other influential factors prevalent to recruiting in Power-5 football. Commonly accepted components such as facilities, academic reputation, and tradition (Andrew et al., 2016, Popp et al., 2011) are perhaps of additional importance to the successful recruitment of prospective athletes. As social effectiveness has been found to be the most influential factor in collegiate athletics recruiting (Magnusen et al., 2011, 2014), findings illustrating the insignificance of age to recruiting in Power-5 football are noteworthy considering the prevailing rationale of youth as integral to establish social relatability (Backus, 2023; Miller, 2021; Thamel, 2017). The seemingly universal pretext for the hiring of younger coaches for their enhanced ability to effectively recruit may be, somewhat, unfounded. While similar aged individuals may be predisposed to establish immediate social relatability (Laiduc et al., 2021), the combination of unique factors within the recruitment of Power-5 football players may occupy a greater role in a coach's ability to cultivate an effective relationship with prospective recruits.

While the findings of this study are illustrative of the value of variables beyond coach age within Power-5 football recruiting, institutional normalities may continue to foster the belief that coach age occupies a significant function in the recruitment of prospective athletes. Brett Yormark, the commissioner of the Big XII Conference (Big

XII), has repeatedly emphasized a desire to engage younger demographics in Big XII media content and athletic contests. While primarily motivated to attract younger demographics of fans, Yormark has also noted an increased desire to create content and experience that appeal to current and prospective college athletes as well:

We want to get younger and more contemporary. You're starting to see that. If you look at social media, many of the student athletes that are participating in today's game, have commented on some of the things we've done. (Carlton, 2022, para. 9)

Partnered with narratives such as Kirby Smart's desire for "youthfulness" among his staff to bolster recruiting and criticisms of older coaches' recruiting ability at LSU under Ed Orgeron, Yormark's emphasis on younger demographic appeal and the responses of current and prospective college athletes all may serve as influential messaging for coaches to pursue younger aged coaches for their perceived recruiting ability. The findings of this study, however, indicate that coach age may be a mitigated factor in determining the ability to successfully recruit and sign prospective athletes in Power-5 football to athletic GIA.

### *Conclusion & Future Research*

The researchers chose to examine recruiting data from the two years immediately prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the adoption of name, image, and likeness (NIL). An acknowledgement of the limitation caused by exclusion of recruiting rankings during the COVID-19 pandemic and since the adoption of NIL is necessary. However, such exclusion provides ample opportunity for future research

examining coaches' age and recruiting rankings in the modern NIL era of Power-5 football.

In addition, recruiting seldom occurs in a silo. Head coaches are typically proactively involved in the recruitment of high-profile prospects (e.g., five-stars, quarterbacks) and numerous members of a football program are typically involved in successfully recruiting and signing prospective athletes to athletic GIA. While a noteworthy limitation, the nature of serving as a primary recruiter is indicative of the innate value a coach occupied in the successful recruitment of a prospective athlete. As such, the researchers were unable to identify any additional metric to accurately capture the relevance of coach age to recruiting ability.

In addition to examining the phenomenon of age and recruiting ability given the perceived significance of NIL to a prospective athletes' enrollment decision, future research analyzing coach age and recruiting ability in other NCAA sports may be insightful. Upon his hiring as the head men's basketball coach at the University of Florida in 2022, CBS Sports conducted an exposé on Todd Golden during his first months on the job. Golden's specific conversational tone when speaking with recruits was duly noted:

The way Golden's talking to [recruits] is not the way he's been talking to me or his staff. Understanding how to talk to players can give coaches an edge. At 37, Golden uses his age to his advantage. (Norlander, 2022, para. 74)

Perhaps such common misconception pertaining to coach age and recruiting ability as identified over two Power-5 football recruiting classes in this study is prevalent in other sports.

## References

- Andrew, D.P., Martinez, J.M., & Flavell, S. (2016). Examining college choice among NCAA student-athletes: An exploration of gender differences. *Journal of Contemporary Athletics*, 10(3), 201-214.
- Backus, W. (2023, January 28). Brian Hartline, Jim Leonhard among college football assistants that could become head coaches soon. *247Sports*. [https://247sports.com/LongFormArticle/Brian-Hartline-Jim-Leonhard-among-college-football-assistants-that-could-become-head-coaches-soon-203756889/#203756889\\_4](https://247sports.com/LongFormArticle/Brian-Hartline-Jim-Leonhard-among-college-football-assistants-that-could-become-head-coaches-soon-203756889/#203756889_4)
- Brook, S. (2016). The impact of team performance and fan interest on NCAA football revenues *Managerial Finance*, 42(9), 902-912. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MF-03-2016-0071>
- Brown, M. (2023, May 11). Here's why an SEC football coach just left to take an AD job...in D-III. *Extra Points*. <https://www.extrapointsmb.com/p/heres-sec-football-coach-just-left-take-ad-job-diii>
- Carlton, C. (2022, December 3). Brett Yormark 'bullish' on Big 12's future as TV deal with ESPN, Fox enters 'final stages.' *The Dallas Morning News*. <https://www.dallasnews.com/sports/tcu-horned-frogs/2022/12/03/brett-yormark-bullish-on-big-12s-future-as-tv-deal-with-espn-fox-enters-final-stages/>
- Caro, C.A. (2012). College football success: The relationship between recruiting and winning. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 7(1), 139-152. <https://doi.org/10.1260/1747-9541.7.1.139>

- Clay, J. (2022, November 16). The secret to Georgia's football success? Kirby Smart's recruiting obsession. *Murray Ledger & Times*. [https://www.murrayledger.com/sports/state\\_ap/the-secret-to-georgia-s-football-success-kirby-smart-s-recruiting-obsession/article\\_a303e4a2-654b-11ed-a803-c354b2a0e701.html](https://www.murrayledger.com/sports/state_ap/the-secret-to-georgia-s-football-success-kirby-smart-s-recruiting-obsession/article_a303e4a2-654b-11ed-a803-c354b2a0e701.html)
- Corr, C., Atwater, C., & Southall, R.M. (2022). Barriers to advancement: The value of Black coaches as recruiters in SEC football. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 15, 647-667.
- Elmasry, T. (2017). History shows national titles without elite recruiting over 4 years is rare. *Saturday Down South*. <https://www.saturdaydownsouth.com/sec-football/history-shows-national-titles-require-great-not-just-good-recruiting-over-4-years/>
- Grant, R.R., Leadley, J.C., & Zygmunt, Z.X. (2013). Just win baby? Determinants of NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision coaching compensation. *International Journal of Sport Finance*, 8(1), 61-74.
- Kercheval, B. (2016, February 2). Do top 10 recruiting classes really equal championships? *Bleacher Report*. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2613145-do-top-10-recruiting-classes-really-equal-championships>
- Laiduc, G., Herrmann, S., & Covarrubias, R. (2021). Relatable role models: An online intervention highlighting first-generation faculty benefits first-generation students. *Journal of First-Generation Student Success*, 1(3), 159-186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26906015.2021.1983402>
- Lieberman, R. (2001). *Personal foul: Coach Joe Moore vs. The University of Notre Dame*. Academy Chicago Publishers.

- Magnusen, M J., Kim, Y., Perrewé, P L., & Ferris, G.R. (2014). A critical review and synthesis of student-athlete college choice factors: Recruiting effectiveness in NCAA sports. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 9(6), 1265-1286. <https://doi.org/10.1260/2F1747-9541.9.6.1265>
- Magnusen, M.J., Mondello, M., Kim, Y.K., & Ferris, G.R. (2011). Roles of recruiter political skill, influence strategy, and organization reputation in recruitment effectiveness in college sports. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 53(6), 687-700. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tie.20445>
- Maisel, I. (2022, October 27). TCU students in love with their unbeaten team – and with Hypnotoad, too. *On3*. <https://www.on3.com/news/tcu-students-in-love-with-their-unbeaten-team-and-with-hypnotoad-too/>
- Mankin, J., Rivas, J., & Jewell, J. (2021). The effectiveness of college football recruiting ratings in predicting team success: A longitudinal study. *Research in Business and Economics Journal*, 14, 4-22.
- Miller, B. (2021, October 17). 'He lost track of who he was': Inside Ed Orgeron's fall from celebrated son of Louisiana to LSU coaching pariah. *The Athletic*. <https://theathletic.com/2891847/2021/10/17/he-lost-track-of-who-he-was-inside-ed-orgerons-fall-from-celebrated-son-of-louisiana-to-lsu-coaching-pariah/>
- Moore V. University of Notre Dame, 968 F. Supp. 1330 (N.D. Ind. 1997).
- National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2022). NCAA 2021-2022 Division I manual. NCAA. <https://web3.ncaa.org/lstdbi/reports/getReport/90008>



- Norlander, M. (2022, July 29). Five days in the air, on the road embedded with the Florida Gators on the recruiting trail: Part II. *CBS Sports*. <https://www.cbsports.com/college-basketball/news/five-days-in-the-air-on-the-road-embedded-with-the-florida-gators-on-the-recruiting-trail-part-ii/amp/>
- Popp, N., Pierce, D., & Hums, M.A. (2011). A comparison of the college selection process for international and domestic student-athletes at NCAA Division I universities. *Sport Management Review*, 14(2), 176-187. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2010.08.003>
- Sparvero, E.S., & Warner, S. (2013). The price of winning and the impact on the NCAA community. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 6(1), 120-142. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jis.6.1.120>
- Straka, D. (2023, April 13). Baylor AD Mack Rhoades fears demands of NCAA transfer portal, NIL will drive head coaches away. *247Sports*. <https://247sports.com/Article/Baylor-AD-Mack-Rhoades-fears-demands-of-NCAA-transfer-portal-NIL-will-drive-head-coaches-away-208286220/>
- Thamel, P. (2017, December 31). Why is Georgia the new Alabama? Kirby Smart's spin on Nick Saban's 'process' could be a game-changer. *Yahoo! Sports*. <https://sports.yahoo.com/georgia-new-alabama-kirby-smarts-spin-nick-sabans-process-game-changer-050129185.html>
- 247Sports. (2012, July 20). 247Sports rating explanation. *247Sports*. <https://247sports.com/Article/247Sports-Rating-Explanation-81574/>

## The Perceived Impact of the New Rules Regulating Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) on Intercollegiate Sports

*Michael McCall*

*Michigan State University*

*Sam Fullerton*

*North-West University (South Africa)*

*Ronald Dick*

*Duquesne University*

*Ron Wade*

*University of Michigan*

College athletes can earn significant income from promotions and the sale of promotional items that bear their name, image, or likeness (NIL). The short-and-long term impact of NIL remains a topic of debate among coaches and athletic observers and is proving to be a fertile new area for academic researchers. The purpose of this research was to better understand the impact of NIL at the consumer level. A purposive sample of 404 students from five American universities in three states provided feedback regarding their perceptions of nine NIL-related considerations: the impact that the new NIL rules have had on several potential beneficiaries of the new rules, college sports, the school, and the athletes who participate in collegiate sports. Several interesting findings emerged: (1) university students generally have a favorable impression of the benefits that NIL provides to